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ABSTRACT

A total sample of 1600 fourth, sixth, eighth, and tenth graders from four different social classes completed a questionnaire, the purpose of which was to assess attitudes toward women's increased participation in fields typically thought of as male. The questionnaire is analyzed item by item and all egalitarian responses are graphed. In general, the author discovered that systematic and significant differences exist. Social class was found not to be a factor, while sex of the respondent and grade level are important. Thus, females and upper grade students are more likely to give egalitarian responses than are males and lower grade students. It was concluded that female students see women more positively and optimistically than do males, and that they are more favorable to the concept of social change which will grant women greater participation in the social, economic and political spheres. (TL)

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Attitudes toward Increased Social, Economic
and Political Participation by Women as Re-
ported by Elementary and Secondary Students

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Among the many helpful persons who assisted in the collection, coding and analyzing of the data the following played a major role: Ann Braile, Marcia Brieger, Joseph Notturmo, Cynthia and Heide Stutz and Sally Storrs

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Background

The Women's Rights Movement has as its aim full and equal participation of women in all spheres: economic, political and social. Opponents of this movement base their opposition on many different factors including: biological, social and traditional ones. However, one of the arguments most persistently presented by the movement's opponents is simply that both women and men prefer to retain the present societal arrangements which focus women's interest on home, children and family while focusing men's interest on the larger economic, political and social spheres. Thus one aim of this study was to surface student's attitudes toward woman's increased participation in fields typically thought of as male. The attitudes were assessed by means of a questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed by Ms. Sally Storrs, a graduate student, while working in a course with me. Ms. Storrs tested her own 6th grade class with the questionnaire and found systematic and significant differences in responses between boys and girls. At that time I believed that these differences were chance ones and would not exist in a larger more random group. With Ms. Storrs permission I ran the questionnaire on an additional 100 students. The same systematic differences were found as had been reported by Ms. Storrs. Intrigued, I decided to proceed with a large scale study of male/female attitudes using this questionnaire as my investigative instrument.

Problem

Are there systematic and significant group differences in responses to the questions posed by this questionnaire? Are these differences a function of grade or age, socio-economic status and/or sex?

Sample

Because the students participating in the study were required to read the questionnaire, grade 4 was chosen as the earliest grade with which to begin. It was believed that an efficient way to continue would be to secure a sample from every other grade; thus students in 4th grade, 6th grade, 8th grade and 10th grade composed the sample. By choosing various school districts on Long Island, New York, representative of differing social class membership, the variable of social class was examined. Initially 100 students in each of four social classes were sampled in each of four grades. Thus a total of 1600 students were sampled, approximately 800 females and 800 males. After the data was collected it was decided that there was insufficient justification for maintaining the four social class distinction and thus the original four classes were combined into two--an upper and a lower social class group.

Results

An interval score was calculated on each subject by converting the answers on items 1-19 into an egalitarian score. Answers to question 20 were excluded from the egalitarian score. For although the patterns of male/female responses is quite dissimilar the meaning of the responses were difficult to evaluate in terms of their egalitarian dimension. Thus answering yes to items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 16, 17, 18 and 19, and no to items 13, 14, and 15 were all scored as Positive on the egalitarian score. A three way analysis of variance was then performed on the data. No differences exist between members of the two social classes. Some significant differences were revealed in analyzing the answers by grade. Males in grades 6, 8, and 10 had higher egalitarian scores than males in grade 4. Females in grades 8 and 10 had higher egalitarian scores than females in grades 4 and 6 (these differences were significant at the .01 level). However, in all age and social class groups females had consistently and significantly more egalitarian scores (sig. at the .01 level) than males.

In analyzing the questionnaire item by item, the following percentages of female/male answers were calculated.

Item 1

Do you think that it's fair for a woman to have the same chance as a man (equal opportunity) to apply for and work at any job she wants if she is qualified?

Female Response Yes 92% No 8% Male Response Yes 80% No 20%

Item 2

Do you feel that a female doctor or dentist would be as good as a male?

Female Response Yes 81% No 19% Male Response Yes 70% No 30%

Item 3

Should radio and TV stations hire more female announcers and newscasters?

Female Response Yes 66% No 34% Male Response Yes 52% No 48%

Item 4

Should we have more female jockeys at the race track?

Female Response Yes 46% No 54% Male Response Yes 30% No 70%

Item 5

Are lady scientists as smart as male scientists?

Female Response Yes 86% No 14% Male Response Yes 66% No 34%

Item 6

Would a trained female garage mechanic be as good as a man if your car needed fixing?

Female Response Yes 50% No 50% Male Response Yes 33% No 67%

Item 7

Should we have female astronauts?

Female Response Yes 58% No 42% Male Response Yes 35% No 65%

Item 8

Should more women be encouraged to become lawyers, judges and senators?

Female Response Yes 82% No 18% Male Response Yes 41% No 59%

Item 9

Do you think that we will ever have a woman president?

Female Response Yes 60% No 40% Male Response Yes 39% No 61%

Item 10

Are women as intelligent as men?

Female Response Yes 94% No 6% Male Response Yes 71% No 29%

Item 11

Do you think that most female teachers are as good as most male teachers?

Female Response Yes 91% No 9% Male Response Yes 78% No 22%

Item 12

Do you feel that a female would be as good a school principal as a male?

Female Response Yes 73% No 27% Male Response Yes 53% No 47%

Item 13

Do women become upset more easily than men?

Female Response Yes 83% No 17% Male Response Yes 85% No 15%

Item 14

Would you mind working for a woman boss?

Female Response Yes 25% No 75% Male Response Yes 47% No 53%

Item 15

Is it right that men should be expected to open doors and take off their hats for women if women have equal jobs?

Female Response Yes 68% No 32% Male Response Yes 48% No 52%

Item 16

Do you think that men should be allowed to hold jobs that women usually do, such as airline stewards as well as male secretaries?

Female Response Yes 48% No 52% Male Response Yes 39% No 61%

Item 17

Do you think that women in all countries of the world should have equal rights to men?

Female Response Yes 81% No 19% Male Response Yes 63% No 37%

Item 18

Should women in all countries be allowed to vote for their leaders if men do?

Female Response Yes 81% No 19% Male Response Yes 70% No 30%

Item 19

Do you feel that women are as talented as men in art, music, the theatre (acting)?

Female Response Yes 95% No 5% Male Response Yes 80% No 20%

Item 20

Is it better to be a man or woman in the United States today?

Female Response -Man- 19%

Woman - 22%

Both are Equal-59%

Male Response Man- 48%

Woman- 12%

Both are Equal - 40%

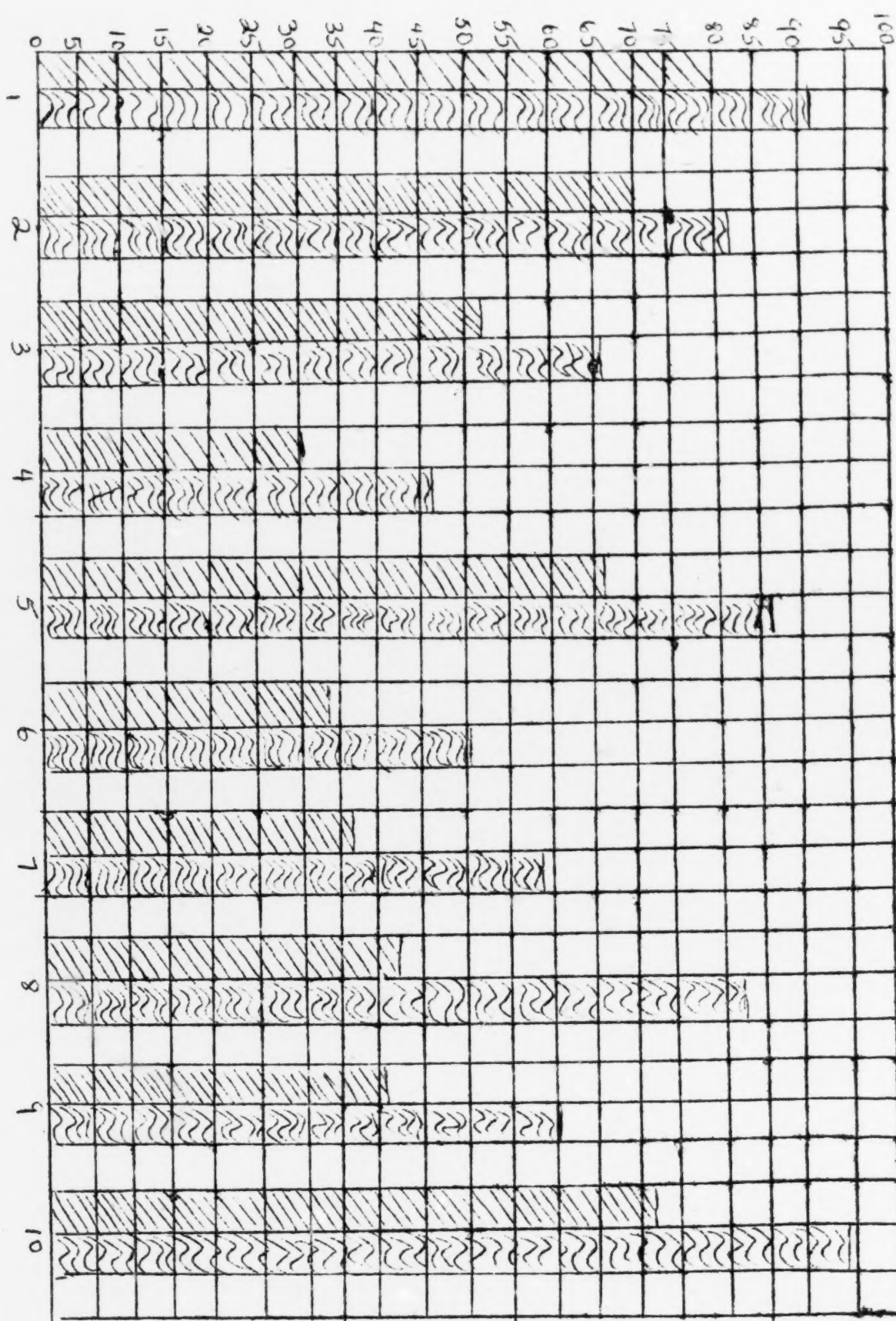
A graph of these responses follow

Egalitarian Answers

- 5 -

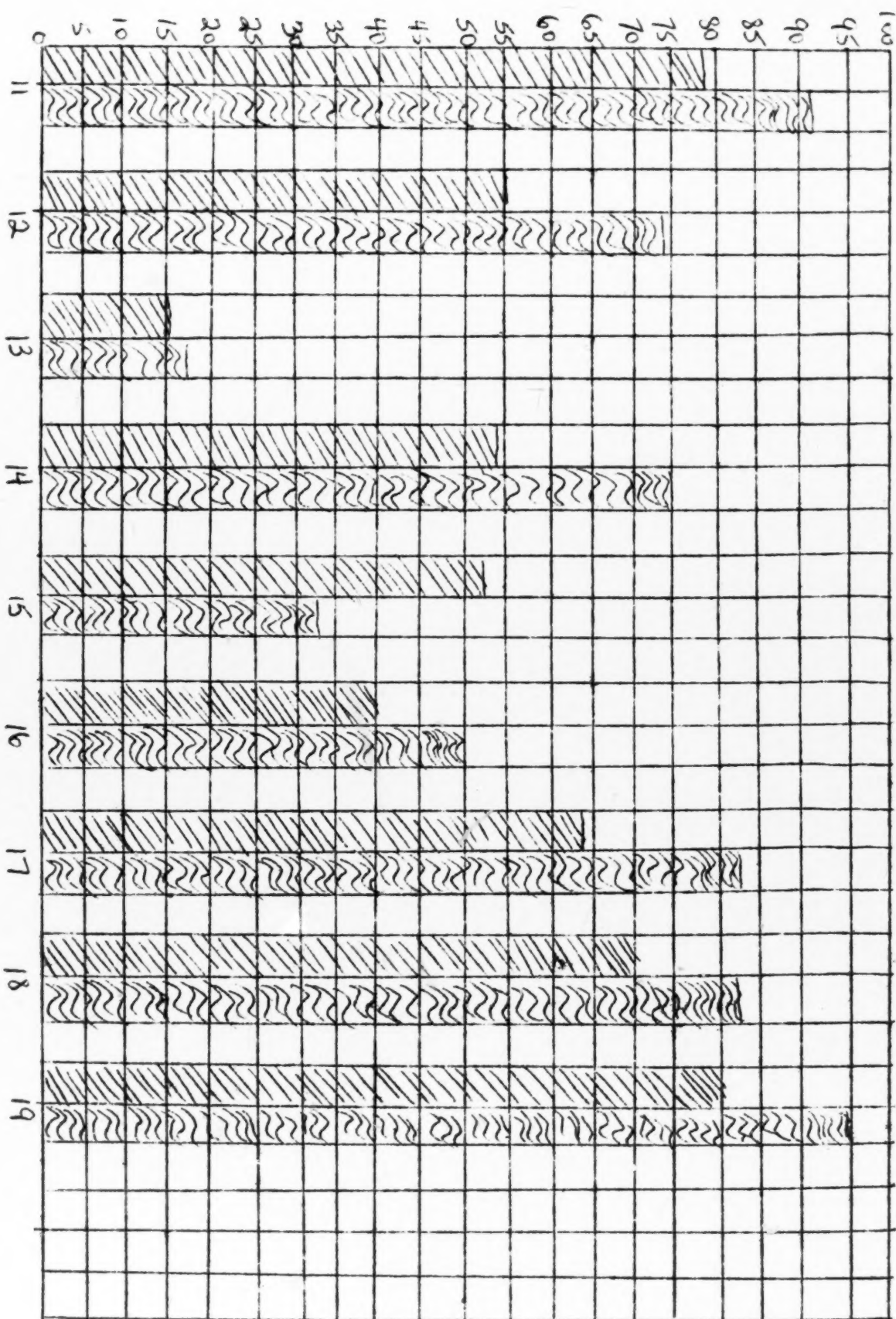
MALE

FEMALE



Egalitarian Answers

- 6 -



MALE



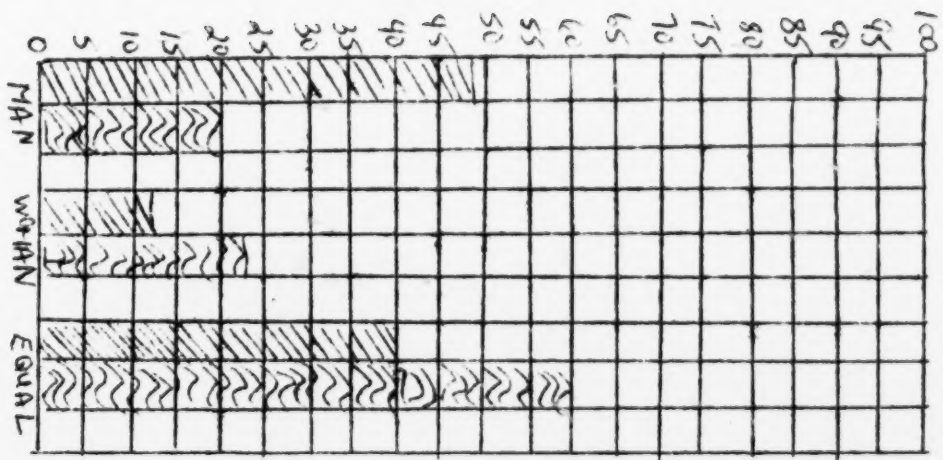
FEMALE

Equalitarian Answers

- 7 -

 MALE
  FEMALE

20



Item 15, Is it right that men should be expected to open doors and take off their hats for women if women have equal jobs?- was the one item which was answered in more egalitarian form by males than by females.

Item 13, Do women become upset more easily than a man?- was the one question in which agreement of males and females was almost perfect. Males saying "yes" 87% of the time and females saying "yes" 85% of the time. Interestingly enough the results of the 1600 student study was very close to the results of the original pilot study.

Discussion

Although concerned with the difficulty of some of the wording of several questions, i.e.- "Would you mind working for a woman boss?" and the unconscious anti-women bias in other questions, i.e. "Are women as intelligent as men?", I decided to proceed with the Storrs questionnaire because I was convinced that it is both reliable and capable of revealing attitudinal differences. Since the completion of this study, another study undertaken by a student from a neighboring college yielded results congruent with both Ms. Storrs' pilot study and this one, thus giving further evidence of the questionnaires usefulness.

The significant change toward more egalitarian answers after grade 4 by males and after grade 6 by females may be due to greater sophistication and understanding of social issues or a better ability to understand the language and thrust of the questions themselves.

The absence of social class differences in responses even after the four classes was reduced to two is a surprising one. It argues against the notion of a more liberal posture toward social change amongst more privileged males (at least on this issue) and also against the notion that the women's rights movement reflects only the perceived interests of more privileged females.

The difference between responses of male and female students on questions which deal with knowledge of objective fact or the ability to analyze objective reality was interesting. Thus "Are women as intelligent as men?" and "Will there ever be a woman president?" are not questions which tap personal preference or belief in quite the same way as "Should we have female astronauts?" Yet the former questions were responded to in the same pattern as the latter, i.e. females said "Yes" more often than males.

Conclusion

This study demonstrated that systematic and significant differences exist between responses of groups. That these differences of responses are primarily a function of the sex of the respondent and somewhat a function of the grade level. Thus females are more likely to give an egalitarian response than males and upper grade students (after grade 4 in the case of males, after grade 6 in the case of females) are more likely to give egalitarian responses than lower grade students.

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Generally then, female students see women more positively and more optimistically than do males. Additionally they are more favorable to the concept of social change which will grant women greater participation in the social, economic and political spheres.